The Philosophical Roots of Psychology

(by Thomas Wren)

Lecture 1
8 November, 2007

Plato
Agenda

- Plato’s Historical Context
- His Big Question
  1. His Conception of Human Development
  2. His Model of the Mind
  3. His Method of Inquiry
  4. His Conception of the Individual & Society
- His Relevance to Contemporary Psychology
Historical Context

- The “Golden Age” of Greece (500-300 BCE)
- Socrates > Plato > Aristotle > Alexander (!)
- Plato (428-347 BCE)

PLATO

Born in Athens 428 BC
Wealthy aristocratic family, served in army, traveled to Sicily and elsewhere, died at 81 yrs.
Studied under Socrates, founded the Academy
Wrote 24 “Dialogues”
  Early dialogues: Socrates’ ideas
  Middle dialogues (incl. The Republic):
    combines Socrates’ & Plato’s ideas
  Late dialogues: Plato’s ideas
TWO EXAMPLES

1. The opening (or is it openings?) of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony
   The orchestral performance (performances?)
   Keyboard noises
   The score
   Beethoven’s internal auditory image(s?)

2. A beautiful sunset, a beautiful soccer goal, a beautiful symphony, a beautiful vase, a beautiful dog, a beautiful child, etc.
## Our Four Psychological Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Development</th>
<th>Model of the Mind</th>
<th>Method of Inquiry</th>
<th>Self &amp; Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plato</strong></td>
<td>Knowing the Good</td>
<td>Four levels of</td>
<td>Three parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(escaping from</td>
<td>knowledge and</td>
<td>of soul and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the cave)</td>
<td>four levels of</td>
<td>three classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reality</td>
<td>of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aristotle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descartes, Locke, etc.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>analysis and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reminiscence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Plato’s Conception of Human Development

Self Development
No distinct concept of Selfhood
Delphic oracle produced humility in Socrates

Intellectual Development
Increasingly real knowledge & increasingly real objects of knowledge
“Real” = “Ideal” (because reality is permanent, a la Parmenides)

Moral Development
Virtue is produced by knowledge of the Good
Knowledge of the Good is produced by virtuous living
“To know the Good is to choose it.”
THE LIFE CYCLE

Pre-existence of soul
   A metaphysical claim?
   A figure of speech?

Development as the recovery of Innate ideas
   Anamnesis
   Emergence from cave

Death as fulfillment
   Christian analogues
2. Plato’s Model of the Mind

- Isomorphic correspondence of mental and ontological structures
- Progress from lowest to highest level is “stage structural” (Analogy of the Divided Line)
- Relationships between levels are defined in terms of resemblance, not causality, but...

2. Plato’s Model of the Mind

Isomorphic correspondence of mental and ontological structures:

- Four levels of knowledge for four levels of reality
  - Each level of knowledge has its own structure

Progress from lowest to highest level is “stage structural”
  - (Analogy of the Divided Line)

Relationships between levels are defined in terms of resemblance, not causality, but...

  - Consider the implications of the Allegory of the Cave
### Analogy of the Divided Line

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(B) The Intelligible World</th>
<th>Forms</th>
<th>The (C) Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A) The Visible World</td>
<td>Physical Objects</td>
<td>The (D) Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Images</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note secondary (internal) resemblances as well as the main ones
Possible Implication:
Sun is the “Source” of lower forms. Is this a kind of creative causality? An analogue of artistic creation?

View video clip to get feel for Plato’s language and dialogical style
3. Plato’s Method of Inquiry

Plato’s method of inquiry is to ask questions that stimulate the memory.

Aristotle’s method of inquiry is to pull abstract ideas from empirical observations.

Rafael’s Court of Athens:

**Plato** points up to the heavenly Forms, which are known to us from birth even though we need “gadflies” such as Socrates to help us remember what we know. His method of inquiry is to ask questions that stimulate the memory.

**Aristotle** holds his hand flat, to show that the objects of human knowledge are things in this world, which can only be known through sense experience. His method of inquiry is to abstract ideas from empirical observations.
Socratic Questioning

- The Meno: Slave boy discovers his innate idea of Circle

Socratic Questioning

The Meno: Slave boy discovers his innate Idea of Circle

Socrates’ minimalist conception of teacher as gadfly, midwife, questioner

Ironic: Socrates’ trial and death
4. Plato’s Tripartite (Three-way) Conception of Self and Society

- The three parts of the Self
  - Reason
  - Spirit
  - Appetite

- The three parts of Society
  - Rulers
  - Guardians
  - Workers

“Rulers” need not be elected: Plato was no democrat

“Guardians” are for external and internal defense (soldiers and police)

“Workers” are the producers and consumers of basic goods
The Common Virtues of Self and Society

- The three virtues of the Self:
  - Reason (*Wisdom*)
  - Spirit (*Courage*)
  - Appetite (*Temperance*)

- The three virtues of Society
  - Rulers (*Wisdom*)
  - Guardians (*Courage*)
  - Workers (*Temperance*)

Problem:
If every person has all three parts of the soul, how is a ruler different from a soldier or worker?

Solution(?)
Maybe his analogy is to the ROLES (ruling, etc,) not to the PERSONS who fulfill these roles. In other words, the first one is a psychological division, the second a sociological (structural) division.
“Writ large” is Benjamin Jowett’s famous old-fashioned way of saying enlarged or “zoomed.”
Contrast this with Thrasymachus’s proto-Marxist idea that justice is “the advantage of the stronger” (i.e., a construction by the ruling class for its own benefit.)
Plato’s Mind-Body Dualism still challenges cognitive psychologists who appeal to neurology.

Plato’s View of the Good as the Highest Form inspires moral developmentalists who regard moral principles as intrinsically motivational.

PLATO’S RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

Plato’s Mind-Body dualism challenges cognitive psychologists who appeal to neurology.

Consider what psycholinguists call “the poverty of the stimulus.”

Plato’s view of the Good as the highest form inspires moral developmentalists who regard moral principles as intrinsically motivational.

Consider Lawrence Kohlberg’s claim “To know the good is to desire it.”
The Philosophical Roots of Psychology

Lecture 1

Plato

THE END